

Bureau of Land Management
Northeast California Resource Advisory Council
Northwest California Resource Advisory Council

Joint Field Tour and Meeting
Thursday, Feb. 9, 2012
Redding, California

Field Trip

The councils convened at 8 a.m. at the Oxford Suites Conference Center in Redding and departed on a tour to Redding partnership locations. Stops included the Keswick Trailhead, where the City of Redding's Sacramento River Trail and the BLM's Sacramento River Rail Trail connect; the Swasey Recreation Area in West Redding; and the Clear Creek Greenway near Anderson. Discussion at all stops focus on the success of partnerships at creating recreational trail and day use opportunities, and restoring important salmon and upland wildlife habitat.

Business Meeting

Opening Business

The meeting opened at 1 p.m. and was jointly chaired by RAC chairs Nancy Huffman, Northeast California RAC; and Michael Kelley, Northwest California RAC.

Attendance

Category one, Northeast: Todd Swickard, Jack Razzeto, Skip Willmore, Ken McGarva. Absent: John Eruqiaga. Northwest: Eric Lueder, Stan Leach, Dennis Possehn. Absent: Bob Warren.

Category two, Northeast: Judy Oliver, Gale Dupree, Alan Cain, Frank Bayham. Absent: Louise Jensen. Northwest: Ryan Henson, Michael Kelley, Rondal Snodgrass, Bob Schneider.

Category three, Northeast: Sean Curtis, Carol Montgomery, Jim Chapman, Nancy Huffman. Absent: Brad Hanson. Northwest: Shirley Laos, Kendall Smith, Julie Rogers, Tony Shaw.

There are quorums for both RACs.

BLM Staff: State Director Jim Kenna, Associate State Director Angie Lara, Northern California District Manager Nancy Haug, Acting Central California District Manager Paul Bannister, Alturas Field Manager Tim Burke, Arcata Field Manager Lynda Roush, Eagle Lake Field Manager Ken Collum, Eagle Lake Supervising Natural Resources

Specialist Jennifer Mata, Acting Redding Field Manager Dennis Benson, Surprise Field Manager Allen Bollschweiler, Ukiah Field Manager Rich Burns, California State Office Public Affairs Specialist Erin Curtis, Northern California District Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana, Acting Headwaters Forest Reserve Manager Katie Wood, Eagle Lake Field Office Range Management Specialist Derek Wilson (facilitator).

State Director's Comments

State Director Kenna addressed the RAC members. Highlights:

- Resource Advisory Councils are an important part of the history of the BLM that dates to the 1802 national consensus that the nation would hold some lands in common. Advisory councils are unique to BLM, with the first council dating to the 1930s and formation of the Grazing Service (a BLM predecessor) under the Taylor Grazing Act. Councils are “part of the DNA” of the agency.
- Advisory councils are important because they give the BLM “a better feel” for the opinions in communities served by the agency.
- He thanked the members for their work and commitment of time to their councils.

Discussing his philosophy, the state director said:

- It is important for the BLM to be grounded in communities. For example, the successes we saw on today's tour would not be possible if the BLM and its partners thinking along individual agency or individual jurisdiction lines. The success stories we visited today are “a wonderful expression of good government.”
- Public service is an honorable undertaking. BLM professionals are in public service because they care about natural resources and the communities they serve. They work hard and are highly skilled. As state director he wants to give credit to their accomplishments.
- We, as a nation, are moving into a time when we need to focus on partnered delivery for solving problems. There are great examples of this across the BLM in California.
- The best way to explain the complex mission of the BLM – there are more than 50 individual programs – is by breaking it down in to three important parts:
 - Sustainability: The fundamentals of the land and how we pass them along in better shape to the next generation. The BLM must also acknowledge that the landscape is a working landscape and those contributions need to be recognized.

- Heritage: Public lands are a legacy that we owe to generations to come. The BLM has obligations that come from law, and from community dialogue. Relationships with tribes are very important. He has asked field managers to develop personal relationships with tribal leaders, to establish clear communication protocols with each tribe and to work on projects together -- to move beyond consulting just on third party proposals.
- Community: The importance and benefit of working with communities was clearly in evidence today. It is about working together toward common goals. There are always opportunities to do more of that.

Regarding current challenges, he noted:

- The nation's energy generation and transmission systems need to be reinvented. We are working on old infrastructure with capacity that is being stretched. There is old technology that must come off line and new renewable energy projects that will come online. BLM-managed public lands will be important components of these efforts.
- The BLM must be deliberate about handing the reins to another generation. We need to pay attention to youth and find ways to get them outdoors to build their understanding of public lands and the natural world. Building a basic literacy about the outdoors and natural resources will help build emotional attachments to the land. By providing hands-on experiences, the BLM can help develop interests in natural resources careers.

There was a continuing discussion on topics including Land and Water Conservation Funds, budget reductions, possible partnerships with California State Parks, BLM policy on road closures, and whether or not the RAC makes a difference. Skip Willmore expressed hope that the state director will be reporting back on whether the RAC is making a difference. There were also comments about the status of wilderness study areas, and the impacts on BLM policy from changing demographics in the West.

RAC Orientation (information)

Public Affairs Officer Jeff Fontana presented an overview of the RACs' charters and operational procedures:

Authority and Charters: The BLM's Resource Advisory Councils are authorized under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The current council configurations date to the BLM's Healthy Land Regulations of 1995.

Function of the councils is governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) of 1972. The Act directs the establishment, operation, oversight and termination of advisory boards. Importantly, FACA:

- Recognizes the merits of federal agencies seeking the advice and assistance of citizens
- Notes the importance of federal officials and the nation having access to information and advice on a broad range of issues affecting federal policies and programs, and the importance of public opportunities to provide input into a process that may form the basis for government decisions.
- Requires that membership be balanced
- Mandates that meetings be open to the public and announced in advance
- Requires that meeting records be available to the public
- Requires charters and assigned Designated Federal Officials for each council
- Sets rules regarding financial conflicts for members

Overview of BLM RACs

- 24 RACS operate in the 11 Western states
- RACs can be organized along district lines, BLM state lines, or geographic lines.
- RAC membership is balanced according to areas of interest and geography.

RACs are part of the “fabric” of the BLM and actually predate the agency. The first advisory council was formed in 1937 under the Grazing Service. The councils have evolved and changed with the evolution of BLM’s multiple use mission.

Today’s RACs date to 1995 and the BLM land health regulations which eliminated old district advisory councils and grazing advisory boards, replacing them with RACs.

The RAC Charters: The advisory council reports to the secretary of the interior through the BLM designated federal official. For the Northwest and Northeast California RACs this is the Northern California District manager. Members serve without salary, but are reimbursed for expenses. Duties include:

- Developing recommendations regarding preparation, amendment and implementation of land use plans
- Gathering and analyzing information, conducting field studies, hearing public comments and advising on issues before the BLM.
- Advising BLM in developing recommendations on ecosystem management concepts.
- Providing advice to the BLM on best ways to work with local groups.

The council does not:

- Advise on budget or personnel matters (the council can advise on long term planning and priorities).
- Lobby members of Congress or other elected bodies on behalf of the BLM.

RAC Composition: Each RAC consists of 12 to 15 members from diverse interests in local communities, including ranchers, environmental groups, tribes, State and local government officials, academics, and other public land users. Each Council must include representatives of three categories:

- Commercial/commodity interests
 - Grazing permit holders
 - Forestry/commercial timber
 - Energy and minerals
 - Transportation and rights of way
 - Commercial recreation
 - Off highway vehicle recreation
- Environmental/historical groups
 - National and regional environmental organizations
 - History and archaeology interests
 - Wild Horse and Burro interests
 - Dispersed recreation interests
- State and local government
 - State, county or local elected officials
 - State agencies responsible for natural resources
 - Native American tribal representatives
 - Teachers in natural resources or natural sciences
 - Public at Large

Voting: The Northeast and Northwest California RACs have a history of working toward full consensus when developing recommendations for the BLM. The charter contains a protocol that must be followed if votes are taken.

To forward a recommendation to the designated federal official (northern California district manager):

- There must be a quorum, which is a majority of the members in each voting category present.
- A majority of the members in each voting category must vote in favor of the recommendation. There is not a “one person, one vote” system. This is designed to encourage disparate groups to work toward consensus.
- Forwarding a request directly to the Secretary requires unanimous agreement of all council members.

Subgroups: The charter provides for various subgroups who report to the full RAC

- **Subcommittees and Rangeland Resource Teams**
 - Members can be from the RAC or outside of the council. Only council members are reimbursed for expenses.
 - Membership must reflect the balance required in the council charter.
 - Subcommittee members may not participate in matters in which they have a direct financial interest.
 - Subcommittees can gather information, conduct research, analyze relevant issues and facts
- **Technical Review Teams**
 - May be formed at the option of the BLM or the RAC
 - Members selected by the BLM based on their subject matter expertise
 - Membership limited to BLM staff and paid federal consultants
 - Terminate when tasks are completed

Meetings of subgroups require the same notification as the full RAC, including a 30-day advance notice published in the Federal Register.

Records of those meetings, along with records of regular RAC meetings are maintained by BLM and available to the public. They are posted on the BLM website.

RAC Organization (information and comments)

Nancy Haug led the discussion about the current organization with two advisory councils serving the district. With tight budgets facing the BLM, she said it is important to examine the best use of budget dollars, including how funds are spent on advisory councils. She asked the councils to examine the possibility of creating a single RAC to serve the district. She stressed that no decisions have been made, and that her first steps in considering the option were discussions with the district leadership team and with the RACs.

She stressed the importance of retaining the value of the RACs while being more financially efficient. She asked for a look at the advantages and drawbacks of creating a single RAC that would cover the entire district. She asked members to look at possible advantages of a single RAC with a broader focus, compared with the current organization where RAC focus is more geographically limited.

Member comments (statements with no single member attribution reflect thoughts shared by several members):

- There was considerable discussion about costs. Members suggested that a breakdown of costs per council, a breakdown of BLM expenditures for each and an expense projection for a single RAC should be provided to the councils.

- Ryan Henson: Of 26 major issues before the NW RAC in his tenure, 22 were very local. four were regional: fees for public lands use, re-establishing 3-tier management (the NW RAC opposed), OHV standards, grazing management. RACS are more effective when they are aware of local conditions. The two RACS have very few issues in common.
- There was a request for a report on the issues that have been addressed by each council.
- Skip Willmore: it would be difficult for members to maintain up to date knowledge on such a large geographic area covering the entire Northern California District. As an example, he does not have experience in the western parts of the district to provide good advice to managers. He cited the BLM statements on member responsibilities calling for members with local knowledge, saying this local knowledge would be diluted if a single RAC covered a larger jurisdiction. Additionally, a bigger region will require more meeting travel and more travel time for BLM managers away from work. Adding more manager travel is not the best use of BLM funds. Longer travel periods would mean more lost days of work for RAC members.
- A larger RAC would pull field managers into areas to hear discussions about topics that do not affect their field office areas.
- In a larger RAC subcommittees would be needed to do area-specific work. There would be more costs if more geographically-oriented subcommittees were used because there would be more subcommittee travel.
- The quality of the input in a single district RAC would be compromised by less knowledge, longer commutes, and less passion on the issues.
- Frank Bayham: a RAC focusing on a larger region would disintegrate the sense of community we now have on smaller RACS. He referred to State Director Jim Kenna's comments on the importance of community relationships.
- The RACs are grounded in communities and local groups; it is referenced in the charter.
- There was a request that BLM research how other RACs function when assigned to larger geographic areas.
- BLM should attach a dollar value to input provided by RACs. The value of the input would be decreased in a single district RAC because of the loss of local knowledge.

- Creating a single district RAC would mean membership distribution would have to change to maintain geographic balance.
- A new RAC would need a new charter.
- Having smaller RACS more regionally focused would be more economical than a single, broadly focused RAC.

There was continuing discussion about the organization, alignment and function of other RACs advising the BLM. Members requested information on the public land acreage and populations covered by other advisory councils. There was a suggestion to compare the California RAC organization to Oregon, and a suggestion to compare the work of the northern California councils to the statewide Arizona RAC.

- Tony Shaw: A planning analogy is appropriate: You would not have residents of San Francisco develop a town plan for Redding. Quality participation depends on the detailed knowledge that members have about a region.
- A single district RAC would have the same number of people (assuming a 15-member council) traveling twice as much. Travel would be increased by more than half. We won't save any money.

Members suggested that many drawbacks have been identified. Members were asked to consider benefits of a single district RAC.

Nancy Haug suggested that if the concept is to provide very broad perspectives, a RAC built from a larger geographic area would provide members with a wider range of experiences, ideas and thoughts. That might be the basis for stronger recommendations. This is not just about costs, but also about new, broader ways of looking at issues.

RAC Comments continued:

- In a district-wide group, participation will fall when the topic areas are outside of various groups' levels of interest. There would be less knowledge and passion for issues.
- The RACs are already designed to have representation from diverse interests. The opinion diversity already exists.
- Judy Oliver: the knowledge base would be reduced with a smaller number of members (compared to the total membership of the two RACs at the meeting today).
- Stan Leach: If the object is to save money BLM should return to two-tier management and eliminate the district manager position. The NW RAC opposed the shift to a three-tier BLM organization.

- A RAC with a broader geographic base would reduce opportunities for public participation. It would be more challenging for the public to attend meetings planned across the entire Northern California District.
- Ryan Henson: was mildly offended by the idea that there is not enough diversity of opinion on the RAC. The NW RAC is very divergent. Proof is that this RAC has been unable to reach decisions in some areas.
- Rondal Snodgrass: A larger geography would make it more difficult for local people to participate in this public process. He asked for a straw vote. Nancy Haug suggested that discussion continue
- Todd Swickard: BLM should start at the top of the administrative levels to get more bang for the buck.

Meeting facilitator Dereck Wilson asked for possible benefits of a single RAC.

Comments:

- Ryan Henson: members would learn more about a broader region and develop more contacts across the region. It would be educational about more than just BLM issues -- about the state and its natural resources.
- The RAC would have an extended knowledge base.
- There could be staff efficiencies for BLM. The PAO could focus on a single group instead of two, for example.
- Tony Shaw: RAC members are here to be sure there is an adequate public voice in the public land management process. If there is a staff problem, BLM should address it. The solution is not to dilute the public process.
- If a single RAC were to lose its regional focus and attention to issues, it will begin to just receive information from the BLM, rather than providing information to the agency. The advisory role of the RAC would be diluted.
- A single district RAC could create more subgroups to provide the local expertise. They might be needed to keep local expertise that might be lost to a larger group.
- Shirley Laos: It would be easier to find Native American representatives because northern California tribes have similar concerns across the region.
- There could be a subcommittee or mini RAC for each field office to provide the benefit of local knowledge.

- Eric Lueder: One RAC could represent OHV interests across the region because the issues and concern are the same across the region.
- A larger RAC could take advantage of specific area expertise that could apply across jurisdictions.

In response to questions, Haug said she was undecided about next steps. She expressed surprise by the heavy emphasis today on drawbacks of a single district RAC. She stressed if there is any decision to move forward with creating a single RAC it will be made with continuing input from the RACs, the Northern California District leadership team and the BLM California state director.

She said she sees the benefits of a single district RAC being a bigger membership applicant pool, exposure of RAC members to broader opinions on regional issues (ways of approaching issues that they might not have considered previously), and an expanded knowledge base for members.

There were continuing comments about the value of the knowledge and experience offered by more localized advisory councils, ways to reduce costs under the current two-RAC system (fewer meetings for each), using remote meeting technology to reduce travel costs, and reducing duplicative administrative functions.

There was also agreement to comments from Tony Shaw and Nancy Haug about the importance of face to face meetings as the best way to build trust and relationships. Haug said she prefers face to face meetings.

- Alan Cain expressed strong concerns that a decision “has already been made” that will result in less opportunity for public input. Rondal Snodgrass expressed some agreement.
- Nancy Huffman suggested if there is a need to combine RACs, those with similar issues should be combined. The Northeast RAC has issues in common with Northwest Nevada.

Public Comments

Jennifer Gillespie: Suggested that the RAC use the email tools and time between meetings to keep their knowledge levels up. Members should be ready to make more effective use of their meeting time. If there is a change it should be gradual. Increasing the amount of travel could be a game changer for members. She commended group for participating because "your heart told you to be here."

Closing Comments

Nancy Haug stressed her responsibility to be responsible to the taxpayers by ensuring that the BLM district is working in an effective and efficient way. She stressed there has been no decision. She thanked the members for their honesty and participation in the discussion, and for a clear message that creating a single district RAC does not have support from the membership of the two councils.

Closing Business

The meeting was adjourned. There were no plans made for a future joint meeting.

*Summary Minutes compiled by
Jeff Fontana, Public Affairs Officer
Northern California District*

Addendum

On Feb. 17, 2012, District Manager Nancy Haug announced she will not pursue a decision to create a single district RAC at this time. She distributed the following email message to members of both RACs:

Hello RAC members,

Thank you again for the time you spent with our District and Field Office staff last week. I hope you found the partnership success stories we saw on the field trip to be excellent examples of the great things that can happen when varied public land interests work together toward common goals. I hope you will all take the time to share with your constituents these success stories, and encourage them to look for even more ways in which BLM and its partners can combine their talents and resources for the benefit of the public.

I promised I would follow up as soon as possible on the topic we discussed related to the benefits and drawbacks of combining the Northwest and Northeast RACs. Thank you for your opinions, insight and candor in the discussion we had about the future organization of our advisory councils. Based on that discussion, I have decided not to create a single Northern California district advisory council at this time.

That said, I want to make two small changes. First, in the interest of ensuring accountability to those who pay our salaries, while retaining the incredible value of the RACs, each council will meet twice annually within their geographic areas of interest. These meetings will continue to follow the standard format of a field trip the first day, and meeting the second. In the past each RAC has met up to four times a year, which

meant seven to eight meetings a year for our District. Clearly, the associated costs and workloads of managing so many meetings were difficult.

Second, I do see advantages of the RACs meeting jointly to share ideas and opinions, and provide us counsel and advice on topics that affect the entire Northern California District. Therefore, we will facilitate one joint meeting per year, with time set aside for half-day individual RAC meetings.

I trust, following our discussion last week, that you will understand and appreciate my decision.

I want you to know how much we appreciate the time you take away from your work, hobbies, family and friends to help us wrestle with the issues so important to public land management. Your contributions, as individuals and as a team, are invaluable. Thank you.

I look forward to seeing you all at this summer's meetings. In the meantime, please feel free to call me at (530) 224-2160 or send an email with comments, questions or concerns.